DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 760 EA 020 903

AUTHOR Peters, Dustin A.
TITLE How To Get the Most from Teacher Observations. Tips for Principals from NASSP.
INSTITUTION National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Va.
PUB DATE Apr 89
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Guides; *Classroom Observation Techniques; Educational Environment; Instructional Leadership; *Principals; Secondary Education; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Evaluation; *Teacher Supervision

ABSTRACT

Classroom observation represents a vital link among the student, teacher, and principal. Teacher observation strategies include the following: (1) give every staff member the option of a preobservation conference; (2) include the assistant principals in the process; (3) spend a day observing a particular department; and (4) make the postobservation count by carefully preparing suggestions for improvement. General observation strategies include the following: follow a student around the building for an entire day; spend the first 30 to 40 minutes each morning wandering around the building; and use any meaningful situation to observe, record, reinforce, and feed back information. An ideal/reality exercise for teachers and students can help to create a dialog and focus attention on more effective teaching and learning. The model described asks staff members and students to examine the differences between the ideal teaching/learning climate and reality. (MLF)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED305760

*Tips for Principals* *from NASSP* April 1989

# How To Get the Most from Teacher Observations

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Koerner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 020 903

*Tips for Principals* from NASSP April 1989

# How To Get the Most from Teacher Observations

Classroom observation represents a vital link among the student, teacher, and principal. It brings the principal closer to the real action, to the point of exchange, to instruction and learning. It is usually enjoyable, and informative and places the principal in a resource role in which his or her ideas can really affect teachers, students, and learning.

Teacher observation also improves administrators' delegation skills because it forces the principal to allow administrative tasks to be performed by other staff members while he or she is observing.

## Teacher Observation Strategies

● Give every staff member the option of a pre-observation conference, although the new staff members might be the only ones who show interest. The conference provides these new members with insight into the complex process and thus relieves tension. It also enables the principal to lay a groundwork of expectations for the teacher.

The pre-observation format can be as simple or complex as needed. The format used in Elizabethtown (Pa.) includes several topics of discussion: characteristics of student/class; unit objectives; background from previous lessons; lesson objectives; materials and strategies to be used; measure for student learning; the lesson's relationships to future objectives; possible alternatives for improvement; and any other pertinent topics.

Use the pre-observation conference to set the stage for the teacher and observer to share ideas about teaching and learning. Make it a positive and supportive climate. From these planned and focused beginnings can spring a tremendous opportunity for teacher growth and improvement.

● Include the assistant principals in the process by assigning them observations and asking them to provide intensive assistance for teachers in need of extra help.

● Spend a day observing a particular department, rotating each period. In some cases, you might observe a teacher twice. By the end of the day you will have completed several observations, improved your knowledge of that department, and formulated specific ideas for improvement in the department as a whole.

Provide each teacher with your usual observation report and write a one or two-page draft of your total day, describing what happened period by period, and including general comments particular to the department staff members. Include four or five suggestions, ideas, questions, or considerations for the department as a whole.

You have now established a better link with this instructional area and can offer yourself as a well-informed resource. Keep in touch with the staff members' reactions to your observations/comments. Schedule a day or half-day every week for this kind of observation.

● Make your post-observation report count. Take some time to carefully prepare your suggestions for improvement. It is better not to write down any suggestions than to come up with ones that are not meaningful and helpful.

In your post-observation conference with teachers, keep the atmosphere positive. Avoid distractions during the meeting and open the lines of communication. Remind teachers to invite you into the classroom when they think you would find a particular lesson interesting. When you do receive an invitation, be there.

But observation need not be limited to the classroom. Effective observation involves everyone in every school setting.

## General Observation Strategies

● Follow a student around the building for an entire day and interview him or her at the end of the day. In addition to observing the student, you will have the opportunity to observe six or seven teachers. Write teacher observation reports and a one or two-page report about the student, the student interview, and what happened in each class.

This strategy is also an excellent way for several teachers to do a climate study of the school. One teacher per day can shadow a student throughout the daily schedule, interview the student at the end of the day, summarize instructional strategies and patterns, and then meet with the other teachers to discuss the findings.

● Spend the first 30 to 40 minutes each morning wan-

EA 020 903

dering around the building. Meet the substitutes, visit teachers, check out the library, lobby, or other areas that students congregate. By being out and about, you can take care of problems that might have been brought to your attention later in the day when someone "just dropped in" to discuss a situation with you.

This "walking around" concept is good at any time. Visit a few classrooms during the day, and include art, shop, physical education, library, or home economics classes.

- Find other ways and times to make observation reports. Write one about the play rehearsal, band concert, math convention, career day, or the special effort by the counselor at parent night. Use any meaningful situation to observe, record, reinforce, and feed back. Use your time effectively and generate a positive response and some new ideas.

Observation can be one of the more pleasant aspects of principals' roles. It allows them to spend more time with students—which should be a priority—and to have positive, constructive contact with teachers. Observation also improves classroom activity and instruction. And, for those occasions when you need to be critical, your new observation approach will provide you with more backgound information, time-on-task, and, ultimately, better documentation.

Instructional leadership is an important responsibility. Accept it. Enjoy it. Your time will be better spent and you will soon be far more knowledgeable about what's going on in the building and in the classroom. What's more, you will spend more time with your teachers and your students and you will gain a new perspective on your school—one beyond your office walls.

*Written by Dustin A. Peters, principal at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Area High School.*

## The Ideal/Reality Exercise

An ideal/reality exercise for teachers and students can help to create a dialog and focus attention on more effective teaching and learning. The model described here, suggested by the Coalition of Essential Schools, is used at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Area High School. It asks staff members and students to examine the differences between the ideal teaching/learning climate and reality.

*For Teachers*

Ask teachers in small groups to consider the questions: "What is happening when you feel that you are really teaching, really reaching your students? And during how much of your time in the school does that take place? What are the obstacles—in yourself, your professional peers, in how the school is organized—to a more exciting and meaningful teaching situation?"

Summarize all small group information into a consensus of the ideal, the real, and what is necessary to bridge that gap.

This is an excellent afternoon workshop. Initially, it creates a lot of concern and frustration, but it can be the start of some very exciting discussions about needed improvements as viewed by the total staff.

*For Students*

Another aspect of this process involves students. Fifth period teachers can spend a class period discussing the following question with students: "What is happening when you feel that you are really learning, working up to your potential? And, during how much of your time in school does that take place? What are the obstacles—in yourself, your classmates, your teacher, in how the school is organized—to a more exciting and learning-filled environment?"

Ask each teacher to keep notes of the session. Collect the individual classroom reports and summarize them for everyone. Share this with both faculty members and students.

**Tips for Principals** *is a bimonthly publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091. Gerald A. Purdy, President; Scott D. Thomson, Executive Director; Thomas F. Koerner, Director of Publications; Carol Bruce, Associate Director; Patricia Lucas George, Editor.*